

The Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Stigma in Developing Countries The Case of the Furniture Sector in Ghana

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Abstract

In Ghana the role and importance of technical and vocational education and training (TVET) are not clearly understood by the citizenry. This has led to misconceptions and poor public image of TVET because many people still hold the view that TVET is good for students who cannot use their brains or students who do not qualify for admission into the universities. Consequently, furniture design and production programme at the pre- and tertiary levels institutions in Ghana are frowned upon even among technical and vocational graduates. This is indicated by the dwindling number of students patronizing wood work and furniture design programmes at these levels of training in recent times. The purpose of the study is to explore the nature and impact of TVET stigma on the performance of the furniture trade and the trend of enrolment in both Technical and Polytechnic institutions. Using convenience sampling technique, data were collected from graduates from pre-tertiary Technical and vocational institutions in the southern part of the country. The study revealed that guardian's/parent's dislike and low public image as some of the stigma for the furniture profession. Furthermore, less than 50% of the respondents would be motivated to opt for the programme even if an offer of full scholarship is made. The general negative societal perception about the furniture trade persists and that incites even graduates of technical and vocational institutions not to opt for the programme.

Keywords: technical and vocational education and training (TVET), furniture, pre-tertiary and tertiary, stigma.

1. Introduction

Globally, countries that have seen economic relief, and have chalked success in technological development owe it greatly to the trained manpower resource both within or without. It is a common knowledge that in the advanced countries (such as United States of America (U.S.A), Canada, and Australia), in order to prevent a major shortfall in the provision of skilled middle-level labour, have cautiously created a window of opportunity to people in the developing countries to migrate together with their (nuclear) families to settle permanently over there. For instance, in Australia and Canada, special visas are continually issued to skilled workers who would like to move in temporary or reside permanently. The bane of the developing countries is that because of economic depravity, attracting skillfully trained manpower from without to fill the middle-level income hands-on trained workforce gap, is almost impossible. There is therefore the need to look solely within for the enhanced skillfully trained technical human resource who will serve as pivots to all our developmental quests. According to Nsiah-Gyabaah (2009), 'TVET is the sector that produces the requisite skilled technical and professional manpower in adequate numbers for sustainable national development'. He further stressed that TVET remains the Country's hope of reducing the high level of widespread poverty and deprivation. It has been mentioned that the provision of TVET globally is an intervention to empower people so as to reduce poverty; especially the marginalized and vulnerable groups(Akplu and Amankrah, 2008). They further indicated that in Ghana, the major goal being part of the Scholand Pact is the use of TVET to achieve Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) No. 1,3 and 8, which are poverty reduction, gender equality and empowerment of women, and the development of a global partnership for development. Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya and Zambia have been selected under the Pact for the North-South cooperation among vocational education providers towards capacity building and improvement in access to good quality TVET (Knight 2006). Despite the acclaimed set objective of the government to reduce poverty through reforms in the TVET system by ensuring greater employability, the over-all citizenry's reaction to it often appears not responsive. This sector is still not clearly understood as many people hold the view that TVET is good for students who cannot use their 'brains' (Nsiah-Gyabaah, 2009). It needs however be mentioned that other donor countries are showing keen interest in sponsoring TVET programmes. These include the Dutch Government, those of India and China, and the Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA). The reduction in the enrolment of students into the woodworking departments of technical and polytechnic schools in the country in recent times is of equal concern. The absence of quality and skilled woodworkers may lead to poor quality products, low productivity and loss of market and the eventual collapse of the sector. It is therefore obvious that if steps are not taken, the country will be faced with a huge dependence on imports and thus creating unemployment situation with consequent socio-economic problems, the continual depreciation of the cedi being eminent and youth unemployment being crucial.

The specific objectives are to :

- i. assess the impact of the TVET stigma on the performance of the furniture trade.
- ii. confirm or otherwise find out why technical students opt out of the furniture craft.
- iii. determine the trend of enrolments in the technical and polytechnic institutions in recent times.

TVET is a means of acquiring skills that can stand the test of time in the provision of Goods and Services; a tool for meeting often conflicting economic and social goals. The government of Ghana demands the operation of the TVET system such that it is seen as a credible alternative to general education. This expectation is the brainchild of COTVET in 2006, which brought about the Competency- Based Training (CBT) concept as the mode of delivery(COTVET Report of Ghana, 2010). Notwithstanding these reforms in TVET, its low status continue to affect students intake in both the pre-tertiary and the tertiary institutions. Peoples negative view of such graduates, in terms of their worth as professionals is often very discouraging. Perhaps the double agony of the furniture craft is the scare that the future and survival of the wood industry appears to be very bleak and may collapse as recent occurrences indicate; the repercussions of which, would be very serious. FIRA (2010), in its study on the competitiveness of the UK furniture industry noted the low enrolment in training institutions. When the question -“Does the furniture industry represent an attractive career for young managers?”- was posed; a whopping 63% responded in the negative as against 58% in a previous res and the reasons given included:

- Manufacturing is seen as a disappearing trade in the United Kingdom due to pressure from imports.
- There are too many small companies not able to offer a career progression.
- Low salary levels.
- Furniture manufacturing is perceived as less exciting than other manufacturing industries.
- Lack of promotion of the industry.

According to TEDD Gazette (2000), the furniture and wood working sector has a great potential to contribute to the export earnings and the GDP of the country. However in recent times, many of the once leading local furniture manufacturing firms have either closed down or operating at a very low capacity. Local leading firms (such as Peewood Limited in Takoradi, Ekuaba Limited (Accra), Scanstyle Mim Limited, and others) have completely folded up or at the brink of folding up. In the late 1990s and around the early 2000's, Scanstyle Company had been exporting added value timber products (all-weather-garden- furniture in the Knock Down (KD) form) to UK, Ireland, Italy, Germany ,Denmark, Sweden, the Middle East and the USA. This Company in particular, provided employment to 650 people and also educational facilities in the township of Mim (Ghana TEDD Gazette, 2000). The few leading firms currently in operation are serving as conduit for sale of foreign manufactured furniture as they have reduced their manufacturing capacity drastically and resorted to importation of office and household furniture. This is substantiated by the report from United Nations Commodity Trade (UNCT) statistics database that recorded that furniture imports into the country increased nearly by 400% between 2005 and 2011(UNCT,2011). Furniture is part of the human life in totality; from the cradle to the grave. There is therefore the need to unravel all the myths that surrounds the unwillingness of wards to pursue carriers in this all important professional field. This is what this study sought to do.

1.1 Human Resource (Technical and Professional Manpower) for the Furniture Industry.

1.1.1 Informal Sector

The main mode of skills acquisition in the woodworking industry is the apprentice system. Their level of performance varies depending on which workshop or master-craftsman they worked with. If one wish to enter the woodworking field as a skilled craftsman, one must be able to use hand and machine tools for cutting, shaping, fitting, and assembling parts made of wood and related materials (Feirer, 1970). He continued that having the basic 'know how' in the use of tools and machines to fabricate wood products is advantageous in other careers like interior design and the building-construction industry. But the youth are frowning on woodworking as a career, hence the low enrolment.

1.1.2 Technical Schools

According to Feirer (1970), a good general education which includes the ability to read technical literature and prints, and do mathematics through algebra, in addition to two (2) to four(4) years specialized education in the vocational or technical schools is necessary for enhanced skill in the woodworking sector. TVET is the sector that produces the requisite skilled technical and professional manpower to the economy. At the pre-tertiary level, the TVET is offered at Technical Institutes and Secondary/ Technical Schools, Vocational Institutes and Apprentice Training Centres. For best advantage in one of the professional careers in the wood industry, one must plan to complete a college degree in a programme such as Industrial Education, General Forestry, Wood Technology, Furniture Manufacturing, Wood Products Engineering, or Architecture (Feirer, 1970). At the tertiary level in Ghana, the Polytechnics mostly act as the apex of TVET, charged with providing hands-on training and skills development. They all have a general goal of putting emphasis on practical skills acquisition for the individual and for direct employment and entrepreneurship. The additional challenge facing the HND Furniture Design and Production programmes at the polytechnics in the country is the observed dwindling in

number of enrolment of students. Currently the furniture departments in the local polytechnics are having the worst student-to-lecturer ratio ever recorded, a woefully average ratio of about 3:1 (as the case in Accra Polytechnic), against the institutional average of about 50:1. The economic justification for the continuous running of the HND Furniture Design and Production Programme in the polytechnics is becoming difficult and the supply of future skilled and middle level manpower to the industry for the optimum utilization of the nation's wood resources, cannot be guaranteed. It is worth noting that, the timber industry in Ghana, is known to contribute about six percent (6%) to the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). (Bank of Ghana, 2004). According to Acquah and Whyte (1998), the timber industry contributes 11% to the total export earnings in the country. Also the industry employs about 100,000 workers directly and close to 2,000,000 people depend on the industry for their livelihood. (Agyarko 2001; Bank of Ghana Report, 2004).The existence of world markets for wood will continue and it will be a disaster if Ghana was unable to take advantage of this, especially that of our neighbouring African countries lacking forest resources (Ghana Gazette, 2004).

However, according to Budu-Smith (2005), there is a gross mismatch between institutional training and the needs of industry which has serious implications for the employability of graduates from the TVET institutions especially the polytechnics and technical institutes. The reasons being that of years of poor resource allocation to the TVET sector, notably obsolete and inadequate training equipment and tools, lack of training materials, inadequate number of qualified instructors with requisite industrial practical experience, and lack of linkages between the training institutions and the industries.

2. Method of Study

The purpose of the study was to explore the nature and impact of TVET stigma on the performance of the furniture trade and the trend of enrolment in pre- and tertiary levels of Accra and its environs. A survey study was conducted using self-administered questionnaire to collect the primary data for analysis. Secondary data were obtained through desk-top study.

2.1 Population and sampling technique:

The study targeted graduates from the technical and vocational who are seeking to pursue further technical studies at the pre-tertiary and tertiary levels. The study was conducted on 2014 cohort of graduates from the technical and vocational institutions within Accra and its environs who were pursuing National Board for Professional and Technical Examinations (NABPTEX) access course [Pre-HND] into the Higher National Diploma (HND) programmes in Ghana. Using convenience sampling technique 200 of the graduates were selected to express their opinion using the questionnaire. 150 of the respondents returned the questionnaire but 3 were rejected . Hence 147 responses representing 73.5% response rate were used for the analysis.

2.2 Data Analysis:

Using SPSS software [model 16], descriptive statistics were used to analyse the data with respect to the objectives of the study.

3. Results and Discussions

3.1 Trend of Enrolment in the Technical Training Institutions

3.1.1 Technical Schools that Offer Wood Work:

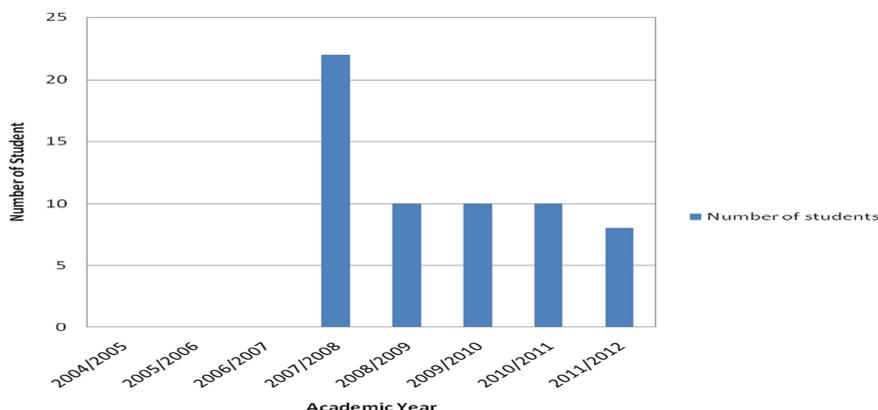


Fig a(i): The enrolled students at Accra Technical Training Centre (A.T.T.C) over the years.

From the above figure, one observes a sharp drop of over 50% from 2007/2008 to 2008/2009; there was no rise in enrolment subsequently.

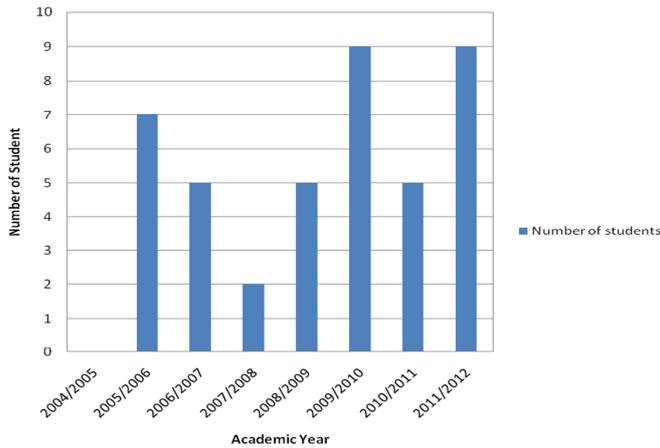


Fig. a(ii) Students enrolled at Anglo Technical School at the indicated academic years.

The trend of the enrolment in figure a(ii) above, even though no consistency is being portrayed, looks more encouraging. However the highest number nine (9) enrolled is still not high enough.

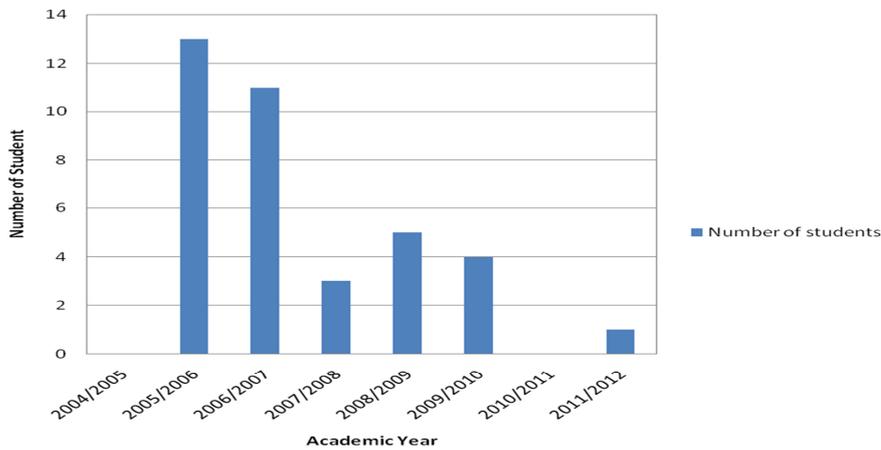


Fig. a(iii) Students enrolled at Have at the indicated academic years.

The trend at Have shown above portray a very discouraging one. With no enrolment in 2010/2011 and a single person in the subsequent academic year.

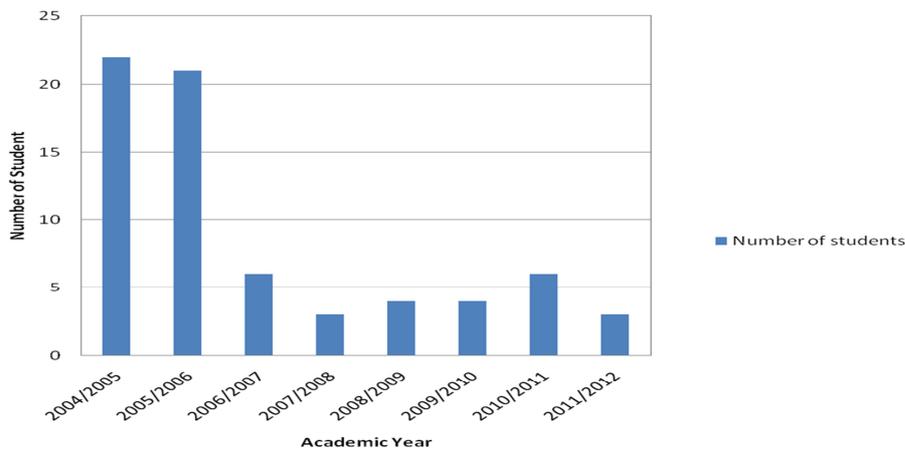


Fig. a(iv) Students enrolled at Kpando Technical School at the indicated academic years.

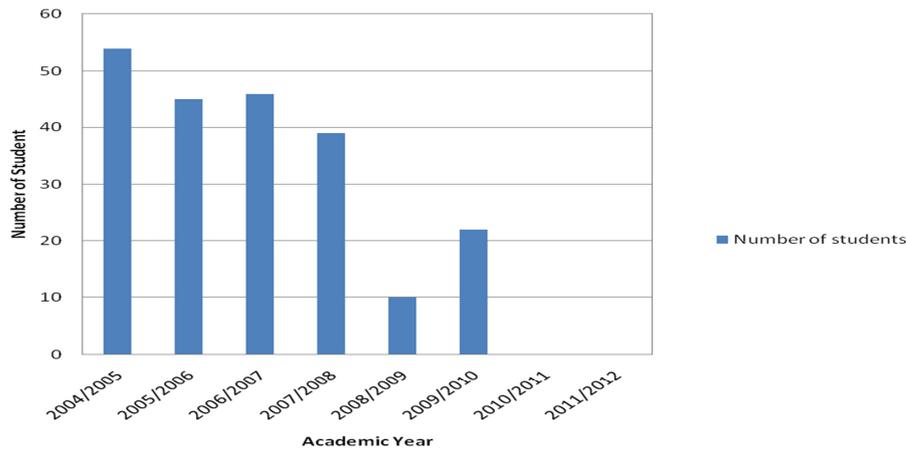


Fig. a(v) Students enrolled at Kumasi Technical Institute (KTI), Accra at the indicated academic years.

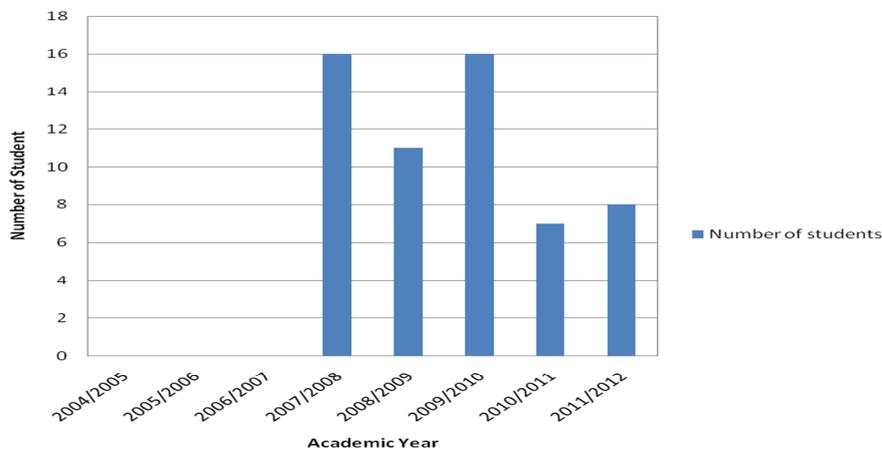


Fig. a(vi) Students enrolled at National Vocational and Technical Institute (NVTI), Accra at the indicated academic years.

Considering Figures 5(a). i, ii, iii, iv, v and vi, the general trend of the enrolment keeps declining, perhaps portraying lack of interest in the programme at the pre-tertiary levels (i.e Intermediate and advanced levels).

3.1.2 Polytechnics and Parallel Tertiary Institutions

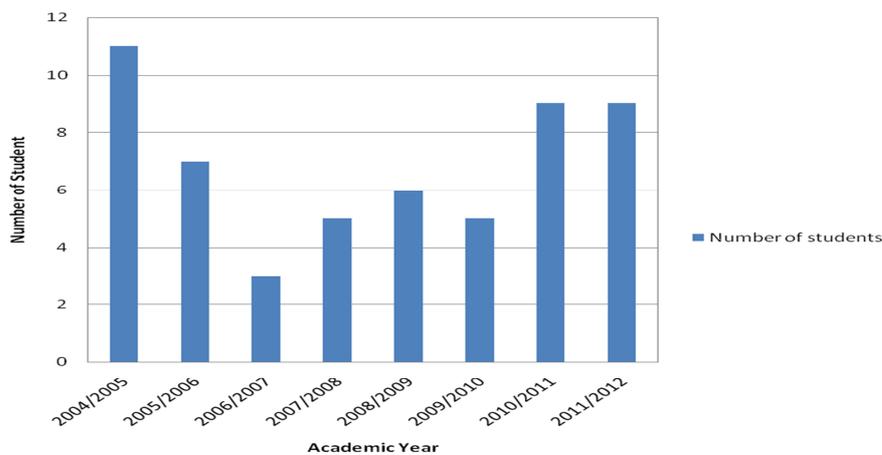


Fig. b(i) :Students enrolled at Accra Polytechnic at the indicated academic years.

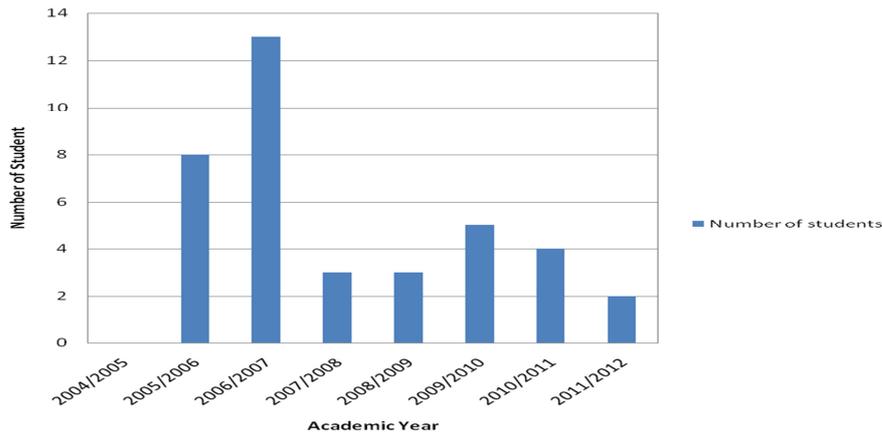


Fig. b(ii):Students enrolled at Kumasi Polytechnic at the indicated academic years.

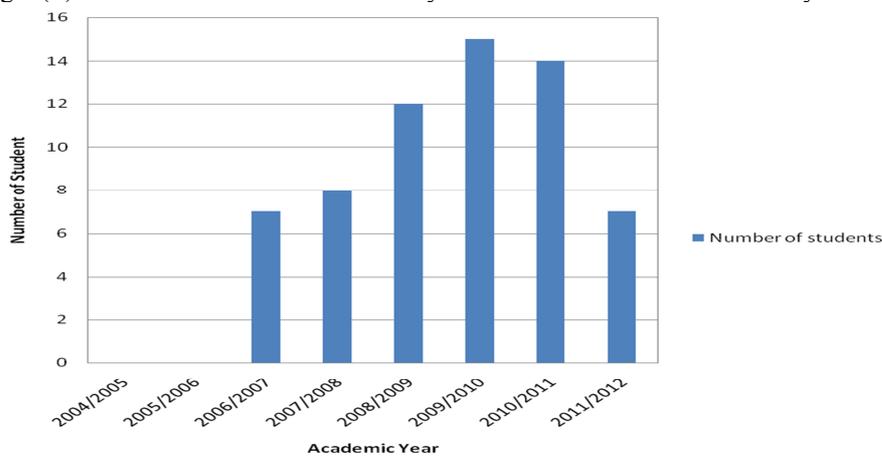


Fig. b(iii):Students enrolled at Takoradi Polytechnic at the indicated academic years.

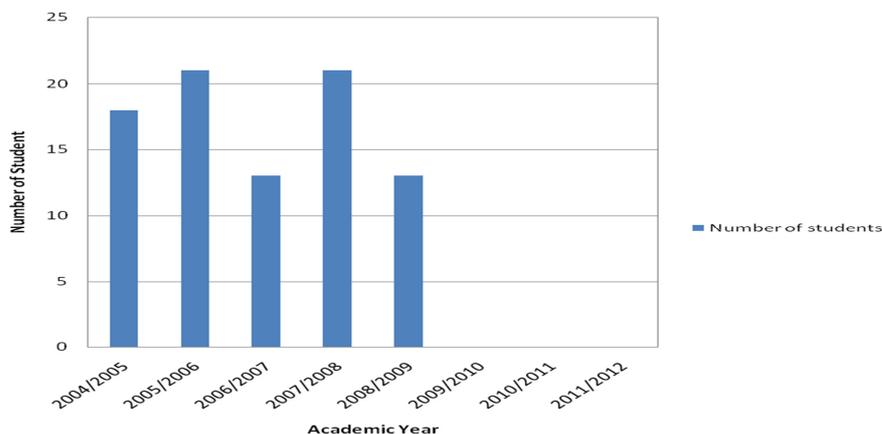


Fig. b(iv):Students enrolled at WITC at the indicated academic years.

The above figure indicate the abrupt end in the enrolment. Perhaps a nose-dive in the operations of the leading companies in the industry might have contributed to this.

The trend of enrolment in the tertiary level (Fig. 5(b)i, ii, iii and iv) is also not at variance with those of the pre-tertiary levels. It needs not be over-emphasized that, usually the pre-tertiary programmes serve as a feed to the tertiary enrolment. Hence the trend of enrolment not being enviable. In 1992, the Polytechnics in Ghana were established with the clear objective of delivering on applied science, technology, arts and social sciences. The emphasis on *applied* suggests that the students, after going through the programmes in polytechnics, must immediately demonstrate functional, hands-on work practise, suggesting that the polytechnic graduates must become the task-oriented workforce, especially in the industrial sector. The preamble to the Curriculum for the HND in Furniture Design and Production (FDP), outlines the aim of this programme as “to prepare graduates to

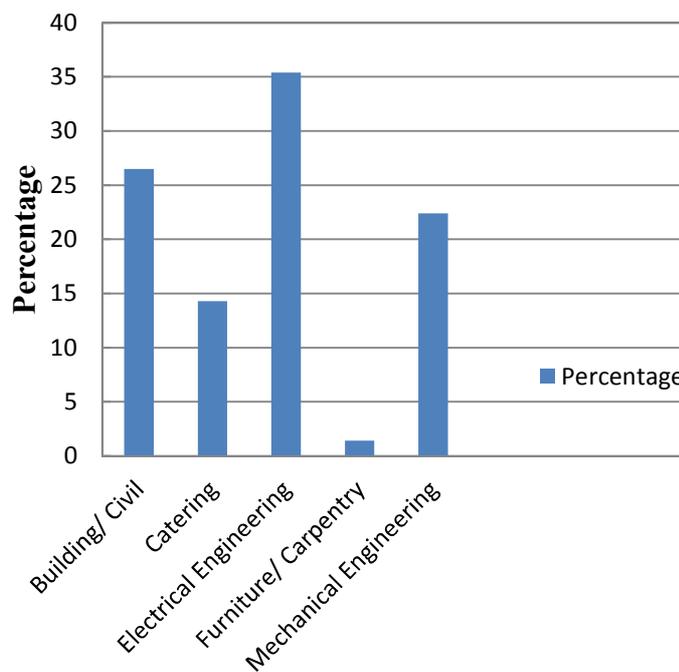
meet the national demand for middle level managerial and higher technical level personnel who have the academic and technical skills to effectively work in the furniture and construction industries”. The importance of a well trained HND Furniture graduate therefore, needs not to be over emphasized .However Budu-Smith (2005), indicated that, there are many deficiencies in the educational sub-sector which have affected the quality, performance and relevance of the TVET system. This has led to the failure to equip students with the requisite employable skills needed by industry. These weaknesses and deficiencies have not only created a poor image of TVET but have also reduced TVET contribution to the national development. Perhaps this is serving as a deterrent to candidates to show greater interest in the TVET programmes.

3.2 Assessment of Peoples Perception of the Furniture Programme

Table 1 : Distribution of Respondents with respect to Academic Qualifications.

Academic Qualification of Respondents	Frequency	Percentage
Building / Civil	39	26.5
Catering	21	14.3
Electricals	52	35.4
Furniture/ Carpentry	2	1.4
Mechanical	33	22.4
Total	147	100.0

From the above table, only 1.4% of the respondents were of Furniture or Carpentry background, an apparent show of gross dislike for the programme (right from the on-set of the technical/vocational programme), given that they were all technical or vocational students.



Academic Qualifications of Respondents

Figure b(i): Graphical Representation of Academic Qualifications of Respondents.

Respondents are of different academic background in the technical and vocational institution; those of furniture background being the least. A true reflection of the representation of the Furniture Programme among the others.

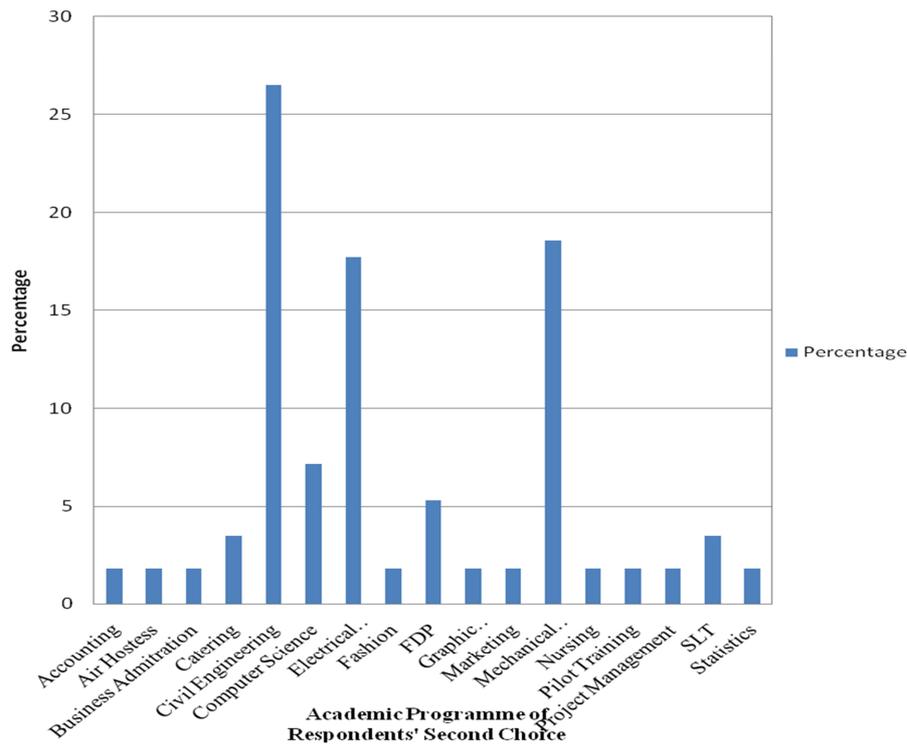


Figure b (ii) : Respondents Preferred Alternate Choice of Programme.

From the above chart, only 6% of the respondents selected the Furniture Programme as a second Choice. Majority preferred the ‘ more respectable courses’ as the alternatives.

Table 2: Respondents Opinion on the attractiveness of the Furniture Programme(s) as a career to the Youth.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	60	40.9
No	87	59.1
Total	147	100.0

The indication that 59.1% of the respondents see the Furniture Programme as not being attractive a career to the youth is quite close to the findings of FIRA (2010), which recorded 63% in UK. This sounds an alarm situation to the future of the programme.

Table 3: Respondents Opinion on Making the Furniture Programme(s) a First Choice if Full Scholarship Package is added.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	69	46.9
No	78	53.1
Total	147	100.0

In Table 3 above, the offer of full scholarship package could not entice more than 50% of the respondents to opt for the Furniture Programme. Only 46.9% of them will give it a consideration. Even though they are of technical background, the stigma of Furniture still looms in their mind.

Table 4: Respondents Opinion on Public View on the Furniture Programmes in General

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Good	43	29.3
Not Good	104	70.7
Total	147	100.0

The above table denotes that, the respondents see majority of the general public as having bad perception of the programme.

Table 5 : Respondents Opinion on Parents/ Guardians View on Furniture Programme

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Good	64	43.5
Not Good	83	56.5
Total	147	100.00

From the above table, a higher percentage value (56.5%) of guardians do not consider the Furniture Programme as a good one. This could influence the choice of programmes by wards. It is therefore not strange that greater percentage of respondents would not consider it as a second choice programme.

Table 6 : Respondents Opinion on how the Following Outlined Statements Influence their Choice for the Furniture Programme.

Respondents' Opinion	Mean	Std. Deviation
Peoples negative perception	4.0528	1.44672
Limited academic progression	3.1318	1.27708
Lack of scholarship	3.0142	1.22181
Limited employment opportunities	3.7054	1.28333
Long duration of the programme	2.3780	1.12637
Fear that material base would grow extinct	2.5736	1.26723
My guardian dislike it	4.1302	1.35892
I want to be respected in the society	3.9134	1.55341
Does not want to be called carpenter	4.0402	1.48651
Furniture programme is for non-clever students	1.8915	1.23895
Did not know much about the programme	3.3622	1.20626
I have no other choice	4.1814	1.15039
Lack of modern training equipment	3.9685	1.16794
It is a difficult programme	2.0775	.99697
Feedback from Furniture students	4.0730	1.13185

- **Scores Interpretation – 5=Strongly Agree; 4= Agree ; 3= Indifferent ; 2= Disagree ; 1= Strongly Disagree.**

It needs not be overemphasized that the respondents were all of technical school background and therefore their responses could be weighted strongly. Responses such as peoples negative perception, guardians opinion, being 'branded' a carpenter, where there is no other choice, and feedback from students on the program , were agreed to, thus under-scoring the negative effects of the TVET stigma on the Furniture programme. This portray therefore a 'double stigma' on the Furniture Programme.

The over-all picture of the perception of the respondents spells a bleak future for the programme. There is the need to enhance civic education on the need for TVET to pupils at the basic education level and the youth who are in TVET. There is also the need to work towards the change of the societal mind set as a whole about the programme. The need to ensure that local furniture manufacturing is sustained and enhanced is obvious. This will help cut down the ever increasing furniture imports into the country as reported by UNCT (2011).

4. Conclusion

Despite the efforts of the government to promote the TVET programme, the trend of enrolment in the wood working programmes in the pre-tertiary and the tertiary levels leaves much to be desired. The stigma of being labeled "a carpenter" still serve as a deterrent to many potential applicants, even if there is the offer of scholarship. Peoples poor image about TVET is still unrelenting and still hunts applicants in their choice of programmes, and the Furniture one in particular. The gross misconceptions and the negative public image of the Furniture Programme need to be rectified through civic education, thereby exposing the advantages of sustaining the local manufacturing industries through the use of skillfully trained manpower from the TVET programmes. Perhaps by modifying the name of the programme would neutralize the negative perception.

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